

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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R 240827Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8840
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY DOHA
AMEMBASSY MANAMA
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMEMBASSY SANA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 4157

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, PINT, LE, IS, SY
SUBJECT: A SUMMING UP

1. FOLLOWING MESSAGE WAS DRAFTED BY DCM GEORGE LANE ON HIS
DEPARTURE AFTER TWO YEARS SERVICE IN BEIRUT.

2. THIS IS A SAD TIME TO BE LEAVING LEBANON. ALTHOUGH MAJOR
FIGHTING IN BEIRUT HAS STOPPED FOR THE MOMENT AND THE ECONOMIC
SITUATION IS BETTER THAN IT WAS WHEN I ARRIVED TWO YEARS AGO,
THERE IS A GENERAL AIR OF PESSIMISM AND NO ONE BELIEVES THE
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PRESENT TRUCE WILL LAST VERY LONG. REACTIONS TO PRESIDENT
SARKIS' SPEECH ON JULY 15 SHOW HOW INTRACTABLE THE
PROBLEMS ARE. THE HARDLINE MARONITES HAVE ATTACKED HIM
FOR SAYING THE SYRIAN UNITS OF THE ADF STILL HAVE A ROLE
TO PLAY IN LEBANON EVEN AFTER THE RECENT BOMBARDMENT OF
EAST BEIRUT, WHILE THE MUSLIMS AND THE LEFT HAVE
ATTACKED HIM FOR SAYING THAT THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS

CANNOT BE DISARMED AS LONG AS THERE IS AN ARMED
PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN LEBANON.

3. THE "LEBANESE PROBLEM" TODAY WAS CREATED BY THREE
FACTORS:

A. THE INCREDIBLY COMPLEX AND MUTUALLY ANTAGONISTIC
LEBANESE POLITICAL SYSTEM, COUPLED WITH SEVERE SOCIAL AND
ECONOMIC INJUSTICES AND DISLOCATIONS WHICH AROSE OVER THE
PAST FEW YEARS. THERE ARE, FOR EXAMPLE, 17 RECOGNIZED
RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN LEBANON, EACH OF WHICH CONTROLS
THE PERSONAL STATUS LAWS FOR ITS MEMBERS; ONE CANNOT GET
MARRIED EXCEPT IN A CHURCH OR BY A SHAYKH. THE
COMPETITION FOR POLITICAL POWER BETWEEN THESE SECTARIAN
GROUPS HAS EXISTED FOR CENTURIES BUT IT HAS BEEN
EXACERBATED BY THE EVENTS OF THE LAST FIVE YEARS.

B. THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE. THIS HAS BEEN A
PROBLEM FOR EVERY LEBANESE GOVERNMENT SINCE THE
CREATION OF ISRAEL IN 1948, BUT SINCE THE SIGNING OF
THE CAIRO AGREEMENT IN 1969 AND THE DEFEAT OF THE
PALESTINIANS IN JORDAN IN "BLACK SEPTEMBER," OF 1970,
THE NUMBER OF PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON HAS MORE THAN
DOUBLED AND THEIR ARMED PRESENCE HAS COMPLETELY UPSET THE
PRECARIOUS LEBANESE POLITICAL BALANCE. A SOLUTION TO
THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM DOES NOT GUARANTEE PEACE IN
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LEBANON, BUT IT IS A TRUISM THAT THERE CAN BE NO
PERMANENT SOLUTION TO THE LEBANESE PROBLEM UNTIL THERE
IS A SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM THAT PROVIDES THEM
WITH SOME KIND OF A HOMELAND AND PERMITS THEIR
DISARMAMENT HERE.

C. THE MEDDLING OF OTHER ARAB STATES. RIVALRIES
BETWEEN EGYPT, SYRIA, IRAQ, LIBYA AND OTHER ARAB STATES,
PLAYED OUT ON THE LEBANESE POLITICAL SCENE, GREATLY
INCREASED INSTABILITY IN THE COUNTRY FROM 1973 TO 1976.
THE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN SYRIA AND EGYPT AT THE RIYADH
AND CAIRO SUMMIT CONFERENCES IN OCTOBER, 1976, PRODUCED
A TEMPORARY LULL IN THE FIGHTING IN LEBANON, BUT THE
SADAT VISIT TO JERUSALEM IN NOVEMBER 1977 ENDED THIS
BRIEF INTERLUDE OF COOPERATION. SINCE THEN, THE SECURITY
SITUATION HAS BECOME SLOWLY BUT INEXORABLY WORSE.

4. IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, THERE ARE FOUR THEORETICAL
SOLUTIONS TO THE LEBANESE PROBLEM -- THE INTERNATIONAL,
THE SYRIAN, THE ISRAELI, AND THE LEBANESE. THE
OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE LEBANESE WOULD BE DELIGHTED
TO HAVE UNIFIL TAKE OVER RESPONSIBILITY IN THE ENTIRE

COUNTRY BUT THERE IS LITTLE CHANCE THAT UN
MEMBER COUNTRIES WOULD BE WILLING TO PROVIDE THE TROOPS
NECESSARY TO DO THE JOB. THE SYRIAN SOLUTION MEANS THAT
SYRIAN ADF UNITS WOULD REMAIN AS THE STRONGEST MILITARY
FORCE IN THE COUNTRY AND SYRIA WOULD CONTROL THE POLITICAL
FUTURE OF LEBANON, AT LEAST FOR A LIMITED PERIOD.
LEBANON MIGHT NOT BECOME A CONFRONTATION STATE, BUT IT
WOULD BE UNDER SYRIAN HEGEMONY. THIS SOLUTION IS
ANATHEMA TO THE HARDLINE MARONITES AND EVEN SUCH
POLITICAL FIGURES AS WALID JUMBLATT DON'T LIKE IT, BUT
JUMBLATT AND OTHERS LIKE HIM SEE IT HAS THE LEAST
OBJECTIONABLE ALTERNATIVE AT THE MOMENT.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 4157

5. THE ISRAELI SOLUTION, AS SEEN FROM HERE, MEANS
PARTITION -- IN FACT IF NOT IN LAW. UNDER THIS FORMULA,
THE ISRAELI-SPONSORED CHRISTIAN MILITIAS WOULD CONTINUE
TO EXERCISE CONTROL INDEFINITELY ALONG THE ISRAELI-
LEBANESE BORDER AND THE PHALANGIST-NLP MILITIAS WOULD

CREATE THEIR OWN DE FACTO MARONITE STATE IN EAST
BEIRUT AND MT. LEBANON. THE LEBANESE CENTRAL
GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE TO WITHER AWAY, WITH THE
SYRIANS TAKING GREATER CONTROL IN NORTH LEBANON AND THE
BEKAA WHILE THE PALESTINIANS WOULD HAVE A FREE HAND
BETWEEN BEIRUT AND THE LITANI. ONLY THE HARDLINE
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MARONITES FAVOR THIS SOLUTION AND EVEN THEY DENY IT IN
PUBLIC.

6. I PRESIDENT SARKIS WERE A POLITICAL GENIUS, HE
MIGHT BE ABLE TO FIND HIS WAY THROUGH THE MINEFIELD OF
PRESENT DIFFICULTIES AND COMPETING FACTIONS AND WORK
OUT A TEMPORARY LEBANESE SOLUTION, PENDING RESOLUTION
OF THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM, WHEN A MORE PERMANENT
LEBANESE SOLUTION MAY REPEAT MAY BE POSSIBLE
UNFORTUNATELY, HE IS NOT. SARKIS MAY BE HONEST AND
WELL-MEANING BUT HE IS SIMPLY NOT IN THE SAME LEAGUE AS
THE OTHER PRINCIPAL PLAYERS IN THE GAME -- CAMILLE
CHAMOUN, HAFIZ AL-ASAD, BEGIN AND WEIZMAN. HE DOES NOT
HAVE THE FORCEFUL PERSONALITY AND CHARISMA TO
COMPENSATE FOR HIS LACK OF POLITICAL AND MILITARY POWER.

7. SARKIS' TASK IS MADE EVEN MORE DIFFICULT BY THE
ENLARGED ISRAELI ROLE IN LEBANON DURING THE PAST 18
MONTHS. THE ISRAELIS DID NOT CREATE THE TROUBLES THAT
HAVE PLAGUED LEBANON (EXCEPT IN THE SENSE THAT THE
CREATION OF ISRAEL CREATED THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM),
BUT THEY HAVE DONE NOTHING TO HELP SARKIS TO REBUILD
THE NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY
OF THE COUNTRY. PERHAPS THE MOST DAMAGING BLOW WAS THE
ISRAELI REFUSAL, IN JANUARY AND FEBRUARY OF 1977, TO
PERMIT SARKIS TO STATION ADF UNITS IN NABATIYAH AND TYRE.
HAD SARKIS BEEN ABLE TO PREVENT THE PALESTINIANS FROM
ESTABLISHING THEIR CONTROL OF THESE TWO KEY POINTS AT
THAT TIME, SUBSEQUENT EVENTS MIGHT HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT.
SINCE THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT CAME TO POWER, THE ISRAELIS
HAVE NOT ONLY STRUCK AT PALESTINIAN TARGETS IN LEBANON
(AN ACTION THAT IS UNDERSTANDABLE AND PERHAPS
JUSTIFIABLE GIVEN THE PROVOCATIONS AND ISRAELIS
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LEGITIMATE SECURITY CONCERNS), THEY HAVE ALSO WORKED
STEADILY AND OPENLY TO STRENGTHEN THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS
ON THE BORDER AND THE MARONITE HARDLINERS IN BEIRUT.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE "GOOD FENCE" OR OPEN GATES, THE BUILDING UP OF HADDAD AND SHIDIAC, THE SUPPLY OF ARMS AND AMMUNITION TO CHRISTIAN MILITIAS IN THE SOUTH AND IN THE BEIRUT AREA, THE BELLICOSE STATEMENTS BY SENIOR ISRAELI OFFICIALS, THE OVERFLIGHTS OF ISRAELI AIRCRAFT DURING THE PAST MONTH, HAVE ALL CONTRIBUTED TO THE INTRANSIGENCE OF THE MARONITE HARDLINERS AND MADE IT MUCH MORE DIFFICULT FOR SARKIS TO PERSUADE THEM TO AGREE TO A WORKABLE COMPROMISE WITH THEIR POLITICAL OPPONENTS IN LEBANON. THE ISRAELIS MUST KNOW THAT THEIR ACTIONS OVER THE LAST 18 MONTHS MAKE IT ALL BUT IMPOSSIBLE FOR SARKIS TO WORK OUT AN ENTENTE BETWEEN LEBANON'S COMPETING FACTIONS. IT IS THEREFORE HARD TO ESCAPE THE CONCLUSION THAT THE ISRAELIS DO NOT WANT PEACE AND STABILITY IN LEBANON AT THIS TIME, UNLESS IT IS ON THEIR TERMS. WHY SHOULD THEY, SINCE A STABLE, INDEPENDENT NATIONAL LEBANESE GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE TO SEVER THE RIGHTWING MARONITE CONNECTION WITH ISRAEL AND CLOSE THE GOOD FENCE?

8. THE EVENTS OF THE PAST MONTH HAVE SHOWN THAT FIGHTING IN LEBANON COULD LEAD TO A DIRECT SYRIAN-ISRAELI CONFRONTATION. THERE IS LITTLE THE UNITED STATES CAN DO TO ATTACK SOME OF THE CAUSES OF THIS FIGHTING. THE COMPETITION BETWEEN THE VARIOUS GROUPS THAT MAKE UP LEBANESE SOCIETY WILL CONTINUE AS LONG AS LEBANON IN ITS PRESENT FORM EXISTS, AND OTHER ARAB STATES CANNOT BE PREVENTED FROM HIRING MILITIAS TO FIGHT ON THEIR BEHALF. WE ARE ALREADY DOING ALL WE CAN TO WORK OUT A SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM. ONE FURTHER STEP WE COULD TAKE, HOWEVER, IS TO INSIST THAT THE ISRAELIS CEASE THEIR INTERFERENCE IN THE LEBANESE BODY POLITIC. A COOPERATIVE ISRAELI ATTITUDE TOWARDS SARKIS WILL NOT GUARANTEE STABILITY IN LEBANON; THE OTHER FACTORS MENTIONED ABOVE HAVE PLAYED AND CONTINUE TO PLAY A MAJOR ROLE IN KEEPING THE COUNTRY IN TURMOIL. BUT IF THE ISRAELIS DO NOT

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STOP THEIR SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE MARONITE HARDLINERS, NEITHER SARKIS NOR ANY OTHER PRESIDENT OF LEBANON HAS ANY CHANCE OF BUILDING A NATIONAL CONSENSUS AND LEADING LEBANON OUT OF ITS PRESENT CHAOTIC STATE.

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